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# Arab Woman's Path to Unlikely 'Martyrdom'

By JAMES BENNET

**AL AMARI REFUGEE CAMP, West Bank, Jan. 30—** Here are a few details from the abbreviated life of Wafa Idris: She was born in a refugee camp, conditioned to militancy by the first Palestinian uprising against Israel, divorced by a husband disappointed over their failure to have children, enraged as she picked up and patched the Palestinian wounded of the current conflict.

Here is how that life ended: Early Sunday morning, Ms. Idris, 28, brought fruit juice to a cherished niece, then went to Jerusalem, where she blew herself to pieces in a downtown shopping district, killing an Israeli man and wounding many other people.

It is still not certain whether Ms. Idris intended to kill herself, or to plant the bomb and escape. But it is apparent that Ms. Idris, a volunteer medic who raised doves and adored children, was out to kill as many Israeli civilians as she could, in one of the most devastating attacks by a Palestinian woman.

Other women have helped get bombers into position, and in one case a Palestinian woman flirted by e-mail with a young Israeli to lure him into a lethal trap.

But Ms. Idris's central, violent role appeared to be a sign of the growing desperation of Palestinians, and the growing willingness of Palestinian militants to deploy women who can slip past Israeli security. Even some well-educated, relatively wealthy young Palestinian women speak these days, like Palestinian men, of a willingness to die for the cause.

The true motives and precise objective of this young woman may never be known. It is not clear to what extent she may have been manipulated by other Palestinians, perhaps including her eldest brother, a leader of the Fatah faction of Yasir Arafat.

But interviews with those who knew her suggest that Ms. Idris was motivated more by nationalist fervor than by religion. She was a Muslim but not particularly religious, they said.

Some relatives recalled Ms. Idris's saying she would like to be a martyr. Whenever she saw pictures of a suicide attack, "she said, 'I wish I did that,'" said Wisam Idris, 25, a sister-in-law. Wisam Idris did not take such statements seriously. "I'd say 'No, no, no, you are still young, you have much to do with your life,'" she said.

She said Wafa Idris's example would probably "encourage other girls to commit such acts." She paused, then said, "I don't know if this is the right thing or not."

Khalil Idris, Wafa's eldest brother, is a Fatah leader wanted by the Israelis, who imprisoned him in the past for 10 years. And the Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, whose members say they are loyal to Mr. Arafat, claimed responsibility today for the bombing.

The tardiness of that claim, and the secrecy of the Israeli investigation, contributed to the delay in identifying Ms. Idris. Israel investigators had no comment today on her identification or the claim of responsibility, a police spokesman said.

In a photocopied leaflet, the Brigades described the attack as a "martyr operation," meaning a suicide mission. But the Israeli police and Ms. Idris's family said they were not so sure.

Ms. Idris did not appear to have left a note or a "martyr video" describing her action, and the claim of responsibility contained no details of the bombing that were not in news reports. While insisting they had no hint of her plans, her relatives and friends said they thought they knew what motivated her.

"She used to tell me, coming home from work, about what she saw that day -- someone lost a leg, or a brain on the ground, or a child killed," said Khalil Idris, 35. "All these things accumulated."

He said his sister had an "independent mind" and had made her own secret decision about "what was more important to her and to the Palestinian people -- social work, or this kind of thing."

Hardship began early for Ms. Idris. Her parents were refugees from Ramla, Israel, who took up residence in this squalid camp after the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. Her father died years ago.

She lived in three rooms with her mother, a brother and his wife and five children, and several chicks who scampered today across the floor. Two certificates on the walls attest to her training as a medic, and to the pride she took in it.

Even before she began her medical work, Ms. Idris was steeped in the violence of the conflict. She demonstrated against Israel in the first intifada, the uprising in the late 1980's and early 90's. In one protest, a close girl friend lost an eye. As a medic retrieving the wounded from the battlefields of this conflict, Ms. Idris was hit by Israeli rubber bullets, family and friends said.

The role of volunteer medic was one Ms. Idris had found after some painful setbacks, her family said.

Ms. Idris was married for several years. But after a miscarriage late in a pregnancy, she was told by doctors that she would never have children. Her husband said he wanted to take a second wife, as is permitted in Islam, and when she objected, he divorced her several years ago, relatives said. He married another woman and had two children, they said.

"After he had the first child, she wanted to return to him," said Zakia Flaifel, 32, Ms. Idris's former sister-in-law. "But he said she couldn't. If she did, the other wife would take the child and leave his home."

Ms. Idris's mother, Wasfieh Mabrook, said her daughter had recovered from the trauma of miscarriage and divorce. "My daughter did not do that out of desperation," she said of the bombing.



As she sat on the floor of a friend's home here, Mrs. Mabrook clutched a picture of her daughter, taken after her divorce, when she finished her training to be a volunteer with the Palestine Red Crescent Society, an affiliate of the International Red Cross.

Ms. Idris looks confident and composed, her chestnut hair curling past her shoulders, a rose and her certificate in her right hand.

"We're proud of it," her mother said of the bombing. "I wish every man, every woman would do the same, be a bomber."

Muhammad Ayyad, a spokesman for the Red Crescent, said Ms. Idris was one of 3,000 volunteers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. She usually worked on Fridays, he said, when clashes tend to erupt in Ramallah after Friday Prayer. She worked at a field hospital or rode with an ambulance.

"We are shocked, for sure," Mr. Ayyad said. "Our business is saving people."

Khalil Idris and another brother, Khaled, said they took particular pride in their sister's bombing because of her sex. If Ms. Idris did intend to die, she was the first female suicide bomber to strike in Israel. But even if she meant only to plant the bomb, her mission was virtually unheard of for a woman.

Watched over by a man in a black mask holding a machine gun, other masked men spray-painted blue graffiti in praise of Ms. Idris and Al Aqsa Brigades on the walls of the courtyard where the Idris brothers received condolence calls.

But Meir Litvak, a senior research fellow at the Dayan Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Tel Aviv University, said Muslim authorities had ruled that women could not undertake martyrdom operations. "As long as men were available, women were not permitted to do so," he said.

Marwan Barghouti, the Fatah leader in the West Bank, said he was not certain what group was behind the bombing on Sunday. "I have no information, really, about what happened," he said, as he arrived to pay a condolence call. Mr. Barghouti and Khalil Idris, a taxi driver, embraced warmly.

"Fatah's strategy did not change," Mr. Barghouti said, insisting that it confined its attacks to the West Bank and Gaza Strip. "We tried to prevent any plan that would change policy to attack inside Israel or against civilians."

Mr. Arafat has called for a halt to all attacks, whether in pre-1967 Israel or the territories it occupied in fighting that year. But Mr. Barghouti accused Israel of provoking violence by killing a leader of Al Aqsa Brigades in Tulkarm, on the West Bank, on Jan. 14 with a hidden bomb.

Today, a suicide bomber lightly injured two agents of the Israeli Shin Bet security service when he blew himself up in their vehicle, near a checkpoint at Tulkarm. The bomber, apparently a collaborator, was also a member of Fatah, Palestinians in Tulkarm said.

Ms. Idris's family said they were baffled and worried by her disappearance until Tuesday night, when Palestinian security officials visited their home to tell them she had carried the bomb to Jaffa Road in

downtown Jerusalem.

Mrs. Mabrook, her mother, was dry-eyed today as she repeatedly told reporters of her pride in her daughter's violent end.

But after almost all reporters left the room, she dropped her head into her hands and wept bitterly.

"I lost my daughter," she cried.

Photos: Wasfieh Mabrook holds a photograph of her daughter, Wafa Idris, who blew herself up Sunday in Jerusalem, killing an Israeli. (Rina Castelnuevo for The New York Times)(pg. A1); At the attack scene on Sunday. Her family said the bomber, Wafa Idris, a medic, was traumatized by her work helping Palestinians wounded by Israelis. "We're proud of it," her mother said of the bombing.; Khalil Idris, a brother of Wafa Idris, with a poster honoring her as the first Palestinian woman to carry out a suicide bombing. An elderly Israeli man died and scores were wounded Sunday in a busy Jerusalem street. (Photographs by Rina Castelnuevo for The New York Times)(pg. A10)